

Mystery Pensions Go to Widows Of 4 U.S. Airmen Killed in Cuba

Women Get \$225 Every Two Weeks Through a Bank From Unknown Source

By The Associated Press.

BIRMINGHAM, Ala., March

3— Every two weeks each of the widows of the four Birmingham airmen lost in the 1961 invasion of Cuba receives an envelope from the Bankers Trust Company of New York.

There is no message in the envelope. But there is a check in it for \$225.

The women do not know who is paying the money. They have been told that they will continue to receive the checks unless they remarry.

First one bank official and then another signs the checks. There is no indication as to the identity of the account against which the checks are drawn.

At first the checks were drawn on the Double Check Corporation of Florida. The women know nothing about Double Check. Their only contact with it has been through a Miami Springs, Fla., attorney. In the summer of 1961, the checks were changed and were issued by Bankers Trust.

Who were the men who were lost in the Cuban invasion? The story given to their wives and the public at the time of their disappearance and presumed death indicates that they were soldiers of fortune who had joined the anti-Castro forces for the invasion of Cuba for the money they could earn.

Their wives, however, say that this could not be true and offer several reasons for not believing the story given the public. They feel strongly that there

is a lot more to the story of the recruitment of their husbands and their mission than has been made public.

Many people here believe that they were working for the Central Intelligence Agency.

The story of the four men was in the news again last week when Senator Mike Mansfield announced in Washington that four Americans had died in the invasion. The Senate majority leader did not identify the men, but presumably referred to the Birmingham flyers.

The men were: Riley W. Shamburger Jr., born in Birmingham Nov. 1, 1924. A World War II pilot, he was a test pilot for Hayes Aircraft Corporation in the Alabama Air National



Mrs. Wade C. Gray

Guard. He had more than 10,000 hours of flying time.

Wade C. Gray, born in Birmingham March 1, 1928. He had been a radio and electronics technician at Hayes, but was unemployed at the time he was hired.

Thomas Willard Ray, born in Birmingham March 15, 1931. He was just returning from military duty at the time he left on the special mission, but had worked at Hayes.

Leo F. Baker, born in Boston in 1926. He operated a pizza establishment and had worked for Hayes. His widow now lives in the Los Angeles area.

The widows have received death certificates stating that their husbands died by accidental drowning. Mr. Shamburger's mother refuses to believe that her son is dead and has been in touch indirectly with Swiss authorities in the hope that they can find out something for her in Cuba.

The Swiss government handles affairs for the United States in Cuba.

The four men were recruited in Jan. 1961. They left here early in February. The widows did not know where their husbands were going.

Mr. Shamburger's widow said that he had told her he was going to instruct some men about the B-26 bomber. Mrs. Gray's husband told her he was going to test-fly planes in Texas. Mr. Ray told his wife that he was going to a combined officer's training school. All said that their work was secret.

The women wrote their husbands through a Chicago address: Joseph Greenland, P. O. Box 7924, Main Street Post Office. Their husband's letters came from that address. Last in April, 1961.

women were informed that their husbands had died April 19, the date of the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Alex E. Carlson came here from Miami Spring on behalf of Double Check to tell the women of their husbands' disappearance. He urged them to say nothing about it, saying that there was the possibility that they were alive.

Later Mr. Carlson and a Birmingham lawyer, Thomas F. McDowell, told the women that there was no hope and that the story was to be given to a newspaper.

Mr. Carlson told newsmen in

May, 1961, that the men were operating a C-46 cargo plane. He said that he did not know the nature of the cargo or its destination.

Voice Heard on Radio

The crew was operating under orders not to break radio silence except in cases of extreme emergency. A voice was heard over the radio that one of the engines had failed and that the plane was losing altitude rapidly. That, Mr. Carlson said, was the last contact with the plane and its crew.

The attorney said that a check of the area where the aircraft was believed to have gone down had turned up wreckage. He said Double Check had gotten in touch with the four men on behalf of an organization that requested its identity to remain confidential.

"These men knew what they were getting into," Mr. Carlson said in 1961. "It was a calculated risk. If they came back they had a nice nestegg."

The families of the men resent this statement very much.

"My husband was no soldier of fortune or adventurer," said Mrs. Ray. "He would talk to me about his fear that our two children would have to grow up under Communism."

"I've heard it has been told around town we all got \$150,000 and are getting \$1,000 a month. There's no truth in it. My husband didn't get any bonus and he was just getting a salary. Sure it was more than he was making. But he's gone and a few years from now he could have been earning much more."

Mrs. Gray said emphatically that her husband was no soldier of fortune.

Got \$1,000 A Month

She said her husband was to get \$1,900 a month plus \$500 for each flight. She said that she was paid two checks—one for \$1,000 and one for \$4,500. The others would not say what they were paid.

The check for \$4,500 was to come tax on their husbands' income.

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